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ALL DRIVERS ENCOURAGED TO SHARE THE ROAD DURING MOTORCYCLE SAFETY AWARENESS MONTH

Virginia Motorcycle Registrations Soared 104 Percent from 2001 to 2010 – Safety is Vital

RICHMOND, VA (Tuesday, May 1, 2012) – Spring is upon us, marking the seasonal return of motorcycle enthusiasts to the Commonwealth's roadways. Virginia Secretary of Public Safety, AAA Mid-Atlantic, the Virginia State Police and the Richmond Ambulance Authority are joining numerous federal, state and local highway safety organizations to remind motorists to be extra alert for motorcyclists and to safely share the road during Motorcycle Safety Awareness Month.

Motorcycle registrations soared 104 percent in Virginia from 2001 to 2010, and as gas prices are expected to stay high throughout spring and summer with the arrival of warmer weather, the number of motorcyclists on the road will likely continue to increase. Therefore, it is important for both motorists and motorcyclists to be aware of one another and exercise caution to keep all drivers safe.

"Virginia is honored to be a popular traveling and touring destination for motorcycle enthusiasts," said Secretary of Public Safety Marla G. Decker. "The Commonwealth's recognition of the month of May as 'Virginia Motorcycle Safety Awareness Month' helps bring attention to the dire need for all drivers and riders to responsibly share the road with one another. Safe driving practices by all motorists are paramount to keeping our highways and scenic byways free of fatalities and injuries."

According to the Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles, motorcycle crashes increased by 15 percent in 2011 compared to 2010 in the Commonwealth, with 90 motorcycle riders killed and 2,036 injured. Motorcyclists are much more vulnerable than passenger vehicle drivers in the event of a crash. Research shows that approximately 80 percent of motorcycle crashes injure or kill a motorcycle rider, while only 20 percent of passenger car crashes injure or kill a driver or passenger.

"Motorcycle safety is the responsibility of everyone, from motorists and motorcyclists to first responders. Motorcyclists must be properly trained, follow traffic laws and wear visible clothing. Motorists need to remain alert at all times and give motorcyclists plenty of room. First-responders need access to vital, life-saving information. That's why the Richmond Ambulance Authority spearheaded the Rider Alert program," said Rob Lawrence, chief operating officer of Richmond Ambulance Authority.

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Rider Alert (www.rideralert.org) was launched in April 2011 to help reduce motorcycle fatalities by providing first-responders with medical information needed to help injured cyclists. Through identification data cards placed inside helmets, first-responders have access to vital, life-saving information on injured riders involved in accidents, so they can provide faster and more accurate medical assistance, thus saving more lives.

“We are very pleased with Rider Alert’s progress to educate drivers and riders on motorcycle safety. In just over a year, we have distributed 195,000 rider cards to motorcyclists in Virginia, New York and a number of other states. A version of Rider Alert launched in Sweden in March and, this month, Rider Alert Programs are launching in Arizona, Kentucky and Texas. The rapid success of Rider Alert is a direct result of the strong partnerships we have formed locally, statewide, nationally and abroad, and we appreciate the committed efforts of all those involved,” added Lawrence.

“Rider Alert is proving to be a valued partner to Bon Secours and other health care providers across the Commonwealth,” said Toni Ardabell, CEO Bon Secours St. Mary’s Hospital. “With the critical information that the data cards are providing to first-responders, our emergency departments and medical professionals are better prepared to provide on-time care and treatment to injured cyclists. Together, we are saving lives and improving the quality of care.”

In addition to equipping DOT approved helmets with the Rider Alert card, motorcyclists must remember that regardless of their best prevention efforts, motorcycle crashes happen. Therefore, concentration is vital when riding. Motorcyclists must treat all drivers on the road with courtesy and respect, ride where they can be seen, and avoid blind spots of other vehicles.

Motorists also have a responsibility to safely share the road, not just during Motorcycle Safety Awareness Month, but year-round. “All drivers play a key role in motorcycle safety. Because motorcyclists have no metal cage, airbag or seatbelt to protect them in a crash, they are much more vulnerable than passenger vehicle drivers in a crash,” said Martha Mitchell Meade, manager of Public and Government Affairs for AAA Mid-Atlantic. “If a car can be completely invisible in another vehicle’s blind spot, then imagine how easily a motorcycle can hide due to the motorcycle’s smaller size. It’s essential for drivers to respect the danger lurking in their vehicle’s blind spots and to properly adjust their mirrors in order to reduce that danger as much as possible.”

“With the motorcycle riding season well underway, we ask all drivers to remain alert and share the road equally with the motorcycling community,” stressed Colonel W. Steven Flaherty, Virginia State Police Superintendent. “Regardless of the vehicle you drive, your best protection is to drive defensively. Drivers should check their mirrors before merging with traffic or changing lanes to ensure a motorcyclist isn’t hidden in a blind spot. Motorcycle riders should always watch the speed limit; if you’re a novice rider, always recognize your limitations while operating a motorcycle.”

Tips for Motorists

- **Share the road.** A motorcycle has the same privileges as any other vehicle on the road. Be courteous and give the motorcyclist a full lane of travel.
- **Position your mirrors to minimize blind spots.** Before starting your vehicle, adjust the rearview mirror so it shows as much of the rear window as possible. While in the driver’s seat, place your head near the left window and adjust the left side-view mirror so you can just see the side of your vehicle. Then position your head near the middle of the vehicle, above the center console, and adjust the right side-view mirror so you can just see the side of your vehicle. Remember, it may take time to adjust to this view, so it’s important before driving with the new settings to practice looking at objects at the side and rear of your car.
- **Look out.** Look for motorcyclists on the highway, especially at intersections when a cyclist may be making a turn or changing lanes. Clearly signal your intentions.

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- **Anticipate a motorcyclist's maneuvers.** Obstructions (debris, potholes, etc.) that you may ignore or not notice can be deadly for a motorcyclist. Anticipate their possible evasive actions.
- **Allow plenty of space.** Do not follow a motorcycle too closely. Allow enough room for the motorcyclist to take evasive actions.
- **Keep your cool.** Even if you get agitated seeing a motorcyclist making unsafe moves, do not attempt to play games on the road.

Safety Tips for Motorcyclists

- **Make yourself visible.** Choose protective gear that provides visibility and protection. This includes wearing bright colors. If riding at night, wear clothing with reflective materials.
- **Allow space.** Position your bike in the lane so that you can be seen. Allow additional space for emergency braking and room to maneuver. Avoid riding in a motorist's blind spot. Make lane changes gradually and use appropriate signaling.
- **Never share a lane beside a car.** A driver may be unaware of your presence. Most drivers are looking for larger vehicles, not motorcycles.
- **Clearly signal your intentions.** Use turn signals before changing lanes and never weave between lanes.
- **Don't speed.** Obey the posted limits and adjust your speed to the changing road conditions.
- **Wear protective gear.**
 - **Helmet** – Always wear a U.S. DOT-approved helmet. It can save your life and it is the law in Virginia.
 - **Eye protection** – Visibility is key to riding safely. Many motorcycles do not have windshields. Riders should protect their eyes with goggles that can shield the face from wind and debris, both of which can cause tearing and, blurred vision.
 - **Body Protection** – Jackets with long sleeves and trousers protect limbs from injury.
 - **Gloves** – Durable gloves should be a non-slip type to permit a firm grip on controls.
 - **Footwear** – Proper over-the-ankles footwear should be worn to help prevent injuries.
- **Complete a motorcycle rider education and training course.** The overwhelming majority of motorcyclists have had no formal training – they were self-taught or learned from family and friends. Before operating a motorcycle in Virginia, a rider must pass the motorcycle knowledge exam, hold a motorcycle learner's permit for 30 days and pass the motorcycle road skills test. Completing a Virginia Rider Training Course exempts the rider from taking the exams.

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The **Rider Alert** motorcycle safety program distributes free identification data cards that help first responders to provide rapid and accurate medical assistance to motorcyclists involved in serious accidents. Launched by the Richmond Ambulance Authority, Bon Secours Virginia Health System and Motorcycle Virginia! In April 2011, Rider Alert is the first program of its kind in the United States. The Rider Alert card is placed inside a rider's helmet and contains vital life-saving information, emergency contacts and important medical history. When first responders arrive on the scene of a motorcycle accident, a sticker on the outside of the helmet will indicate that the biker has a Rider Alert card. The sticker also warns bystanders not to remove the helmet, which could cause further injury. For more information, please visit www.rideralert.org.

AAA Mid-Atlantic serves nearly 808,000 members in the Commonwealth of Virginia and is the nation's fifth largest auto club with nearly 4 million members in Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, the District of Columbia, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey. It provides a wide range of personal insurance, travel, financial and automotive services through its 50-plus retail branches, regional operations centers, and the Internet. For more information on AAA Mid-Atlantic, please visit our web site at www.AAA.com. Persons wanting to comment on this issue can go to AAA Mid-Atlantic's Community pages at <http://www.AAA.com/community> and post comments. The organization is anxious to hear from travelers with their thoughts on this subject and others.